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+ Daniel Ellsberg: From Insider to Activist - Book "Secrets"

Reviewed

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National Catholic Reporter

Ellsberg Charts Change From Insider to Activist  
SECRETS: A MEMOIR OF VIETNAM AND THE PENTAGON PAPERS  
by Daniel Ellsberg  
Viking, 498 pages, \$29.95

Reviewed by William O'Rourke

The history of the Vietnam era antiwar movement has been written in layers, often through autobiography. In *Secrets*, Daniel Ellsberg adds an important, compelling contribution. Its focus, not unsurprisingly, is on what Ellsberg saw and did during the 1960s and early 1970s, but bits and pieces of what others were doing can be glimpsed throughout. After nearly 40 years, the whole story is finally taking shape.

Apart from that history, Ellsberg's valuable book offers a portrait rarely sketched, especially by a critic, of the defense policy, think-tank insider.

Indeed, Ellsberg had been such an insider that he never questions the breed or how he became one. He went to Harvard, got a doctorate in game theory, lectured to Professor Henry Kissinger's class on "The political benefits of madness" (a tact Kissinger endorsed), and voila, the insider was born.

Ellsberg joined the economics department of the Rand Corporation, a California defense-consulting firm that came to harbor one of the few extant copies of the Robert McNamara-ordered study of the Vietnam War that came to be known as the Pentagon Papers. A copy went to Rand because of Ellsberg's urging and the well-founded fear that the study might be destroyed or left inaccessible forever to the prying eyes of historians.

Ellsberg paints this culture of secrecy and exclusivity vividly. He was forsaking many things when he gave the Pentagon Papers (he authored a section on President Kennedy's decision-making of 1961) to the press. Most of all, he was giving up forever his membership in the elite world of insiders, those who run the government, especially its foreign policy.

Unfortunately, this book is almost too pertinent today, given the Bush administration's penchant for secrecy in all things. It is difficult to imagine Donald Rumsfeld ordering a comprehensive study of America's involvement in the Middle East generally and various countries specifically. One can only fear that the blunders made and lies told will be kept forever from public view, because no one in the Bush orbit

will grow too sick at what is being done to defect and tell all.

Ellsberg did become sick of what he had been seeing and doing in Vietnam. Sick enough that he describes what can be only considered a breakdown at an antiwar conference he attended. He sobbed for over an hour in a bathroom and decided then to cast his "whole vote" to stop what he concluded was an "immoral" war.

His establishment credentials were hard to ignore or belittle: a former officer in the Marines, a defense department specialist on nuclear weapons first, and then the Vietnam conflict second, one of the few men in the room who had actually been in Vietnam during the early stages of American involvement, a respected analyst, someone praised by Henry Kissinger after Kissinger began working for Richard Nixon. Kissinger eventually called Ellsberg the "most dangerous man in America."

Ellsberg's conversion to the antiwar movement was assisted by a woman, Patricia Marx, the toy heiress, who eventually became his second wife. She led him from the elite inner circles of government to elite inner circles of the antiwar movement. Ellsberg does not play down, or play up, her influence. Indeed, this memoir is decidedly more an intellectual exercise than an emotional one. Go to Tom Wells' aptly titled biography of Ellsberg, *Wild Man*, published last year, for that side. Ellsberg, in *Secrets*, wants to be taken seriously again.

But he can be maddeningly self-centered in his depictions, somewhat forgivable in a memoir.

The publication of the Pentagon Papers did help to bring about the end of the war, but it also brought about other beneficial changes Ellsberg doesn't mention. For one, it changed journalism for a decade or more, leading newspapers to become true papers of record by printing lengthy documents themselves, rather than summaries. The Pentagon Papers were followed by trial transcripts, congressional hearings and the Watergate tapes.

Robert McNamara provided us with historical analysis in the form of the Pentagon Papers, but Richard Nixon gave us history in the making in the form of his taping system. The release of the Pentagon Papers strengthened the public's aversion to the war, but Nixon's own taping did him in and, subsequently, the war. Though Ellsberg, too, credits overmuch our withdrawal, rather than the North Vietnamese winning, for the war's end.

Ellsberg himself, in a most touching way, believes deeply that the truth will set you free. He wanted the true history of the war to come out and felt then that Congress and the public would do the right thing. Evidently, he still believes that lessons learned from history will make our leaders think correctly and behave accordingly. In the case of the Vietnam War, they needed to see its folly. That, if nothing else, makes him a patriot. Unfortunately, this was continued because both Johnson and Nixon wanted to demonstrate Cold War determination rather than good sense. It wasn't micro reasons, it was macro reasons. And they would sacrifice young Americans to do so.

Ellsberg's trial in 1973 was stopped because of the egregious conduct of the White House, which burglarized his psychiatrist's office, wiretapped Ellsberg, offered the trial judge a job and so on. And the issue his attorney Leonard Boudin (the Boston Five and Harrisburg Seven lawyer) raised -- that what Ellsberg did was not against the law -- was never adjudicated. He was tried under the Espionage Act, but he hadn't given

the papers to a foreign government; he gave them to Congress and the American people.

Given the Bush administration's adoption of a preemptive war doctrine, Ellsberg's truth-telling book about our earlier wrong-headed making of war is a must read for anyone who cares about peace and justice.

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William O'Rourke, the author of The Harrisburg Seven and the New Catholic Left, is a professor at the University of Notre Dame. His most recent book is Campaign America 2000: The View From the Couch.

National Catholic Reporter, November 22, 2002

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Three CRUCIAL sites:

- (1) ...
- (2) (Important new book - "Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers," by Daniel Ellsberg), and ...
- (3) (Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space).

STOP STAR WARS. KEEP SPACE FOR PEACE.

'SPACE WAR' Links -- U.S. military plans for global control through "full spectrum dominance":

- (1) United States Strategic Command
- ....
- (2)
- (3) Vision for 2020:
- (4)
- (5)
- (6) Report of the Commission to Assess United States National Security Space Management and Organization
- (7) U.S. Space Command's 'Long Range Plan,' (1998):

Support the Plowshares, Catholic Worker movement, & anti-Trident movements & progressive peace-justice-faith-spirit & civil-human-rights groups.

The blessings of love, peace & justice from Kevin, 48; U.S. Navy veteran (Vietnam evacuation-pull-out, 1975), ex-law school student, ex-newspaper reporter. Pacifist, cyber-infowarrior, gardener, stay-home father-of-4, Tampa Bay area, Fla., U.S.A.

+ Blessed are the Nonviolent Peacemakers & Truth-tellers. Make each joyful or suffering act or moment a plea for grace & mercy & a prayer of thanks to God. Trust in the salvific life, death & Resurrection of Jesus & in His Second Coming. Come in Glory Lord Jesus Christ. May Your Divine Love & Mercy be upon us all. Amen. +

JESUS SAID: "But now you are trying to kill me...You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your

father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because HE IS A LIAR AND THE FATHER OF LIES." (John 8:40-44)

+ holy francis of assisi, guide me. thanks magpie: friend, soulmate, love, wife, life; my clare ("chiara"), the mother of our children, & a saint -- "francesco." +

Gratitude to: Dorothy Day, Father John Hugo, Thomas Merton, Thich Nhat Hanh, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Archbishop Oscar Romero, Cesar Chavez, Eileen Egan, Pope John Paul II, Ron Kovic, Daniel Ellsberg, Stevie Wonder, Bruce Cockburn, Bruce Springsteen, Bill Blum, Scott Ritter, Daniel Berrigan, Phil Berrigan & Liz, Jonah House ... and Carl Sagan.

Mercy, mercy, mercy.

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+ Deo gratias +

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